

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Ed Markey
Full Committee Oversight Hearing on Secretary Salazar's "Wildlands" Order
March 1, 2011

No issue has been more hotly debated in this Committee than wilderness, and no issue is more misunderstood. Criticism of Secretary Salazar's wildlands order is based on misconceptions that have plagued this debate for decades.

For example, some see wilderness inventories as attempts to *transform* multiple-use lands into wilderness. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose of the Wilderness Act which is "to secure for the American people . . . the benefits of an *enduring resource of wilderness*."

Properly understood, wilderness is a resource, just like timber or natural gas. The Wilderness Act could no more *create* wilderness than the mining law could create gold. The Act directs land managers to *find* wilderness, so that *Congress* can preserve it for future generations.

The Bush Administration did not want Congress to preserve wilderness so they volunteered to stop looking for it. Secretarial Order 3310 directs BLM to rejoin the hunt for wilderness, as required by the Act.

In other words, Secretarial Order 3310 is an announcement that Secretary Salazar, unlike several of his predecessors, is ready to do his job.

And just in time, because the Bush "No-More-Wilderness" policy was having the desired effect. The Bureau of Land Management has leased *five times* as much public land to oil and gas companies as it has set aside for wilderness. Over the last five years, the BLM found more than 18,000 new sites for oil and gas wells but not a single new site for potential wilderness.

The BLM has been approving drilling permits so fast, energy companies can't keep up – they are only producing on about one third of the acres already leased. Among the drilling rigs and the mining sites and the off-road vehicle areas on our public lands, there is plenty of room to at least *look* for any wilderness that may remain.

Another misconception is that wilderness is somehow bad for local economies. While the nation, and even the world, are currently suffering through a difficult recession, the story of most communities in the West since the Wilderness Act was enacted in 1964 has been one of explosive growth and prosperity – much of it driven by tourism, recreation and a rich quality of life -- all based on an abundance of beautiful, open space.

Secretarial Order 3310 does not designate a single acre of wilderness. It will not impede oil and gas production, it does not burden local communities and it is fully consistent with Congressional intent – something that cannot be said about the policy it overturns.

We appreciate the time and effort of our witnesses to be here today and look forward to a discussion that may begin to clear up some of these misconceptions; allowing us, finally, to see the true value of the enduring resource of wilderness.